

# ACORN

The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario Inc. Newsletter



Spring 1989  
FAÇADISM



# ACORN, XIV-1

## SPRING 1989

### The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario Inc.

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A society incorporated in 1933 for the preservation of the best examples of the architecture of the province, and for the protection of its places of natural beauty.

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## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

The following correspondence and commentary dealing with current concerns we thought would be of particular interest to our readers and ACO members. First, the subject of the tragic loss of the public heritage, our civic buildings, underscores the need for protection within heritage legislation. We follow with the destruction of our documentary heritage, which we deem incomprehensible, and the response received so far, to keep you informed of developments. The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario Inc., its members and Council are still a force to be reckoned with and a voice to be heeded.

## Ontario Heritage Policy Review

*Letter from Howard Walker, Past President and Donna Baker, President, The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario Inc., re PRESERVATION OF CIVIC BUILDINGS to the Honourable Lily Oddie Munro, February 15, 1989.*

**“Dear Minister,**

The recent regrettable demolition of the Old Town Hall, Ingersoll, by the local town Council has demonstrated the urgent need for appropriate legislation to protect Ontario's civic buildings. Many of our civic Heritage Structures have a value and significance for all citizens of the Province and not only for those living within particular municipal boundaries. Ingersoll's distinguished Old Town Hall was one such building.

Last year the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario Inc. recommended to the Heritage Policy Review Committee that an inventory be prepared of all Heritage structures in Ontario and their architectural or historic character be identified. We believe that an immediate first step in this regard should be the compilation of a register relating to municipally-owned buildings. Additionally, in order to prevent further losses, we request that a moratorium be placed on their demolition forthwith until appropriate controls can be incorporated into a revised Heritage Act.

As indicated, in our opinion civic Heritage Buildings warrant more stringent protective measures in the Act than others, privately owned. For this reason we recommend that demolition or radical alteration be restricted for five years following announcement of intent by the local Council. This extended period would permit public examination and appraisal, also the opportunity for voters' approval or otherwise to be reflected at the polls. Furthermore, the extra time would be beneficial in the search for acceptable solutions or alternative uses.

We hope you will give serious consideration to these requests which relate directly to the protection of the most visible symbols of our cultural identity.

We would be very pleased to meet with you for further discussion whenever this would be helpful and convenient to you."

## The Archive Debate

*Alec Keefer, President of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, Toronto Region Branch and Shirley Duffy of La Société d'histoire de Toronto, have been appointed to lead a delegation, authorized to speak for:*

The Annex Residents Association  
The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario Inc.  
Architectural Conservancy Toronto  
Clans and Scottish Societies of Canada  
Community History Project  
East Toronto and Beaches Historical Society  
Echo Research Institute  
City of Etobicoke  
Fitchett Genealogical Project  
The Heritage Canada Foundation  
The Huguenot Society of Canada  
Humber Twinning Committee (and its member organizations)  
Montgomery's Inn  
The Multicultural History Society of Ontario  
North York Historical Society  
North York Public Library

- Oakville Historical Society
- Oakville Museum
- The Ontario Archaeological Society
- The Ontario Black History Society
- The Ontario Historical Society
- Seaton Village Residents' Association
- La Société d'histoire de Toronto
- The Streetsville Historical Society
- United Empire Loyalists Association of Canada,  
Toronto Branch
- West Toronto Junction Historical Society
- Weston Historical Society
- Wychwood Park Archives
- Board of Education, City of York (contact: Peter Flaherty,  
Social Studies Consultant)
- City of York Local Architectural Conservation  
Advisory Committee

## Preserving Our Public Records

### Joint Statement of the Heritage Community Coalition

The original land use documents from 1868 to 1947 in the Land Registry Offices in nine Ontario counties, including Metropolitan Toronto, have already been destroyed. A coalition of thirty provincial and local organizations, representing approximately half a million citizens, is agreed that this destruction must stop. Our experience has shown that modern reproductions are inadequate and should be used only as a means of protecting the originals.

We are calling for an immediate and permanent halt to the destruction of our original documents for we are concerned about what primary source will be next. Could it be wills, birth, marriage or death certificates?

On behalf of all the citizens of Ontario, the heritage community researches and interprets the rich history of this Province. Without original documents this task is impossible.

We want to work with the Province of Ontario to find a financially acceptable, permanent solution to this challenge.

*Letter from the Honourable Lily Oddie Munro to Donna Baker, President, The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, Inc., re Land Registry Records, January 27, 1989.*

"There has been considerable public concern raised regarding the proposed destruction of certain original land registry office records maintained by the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations.

As the minister responsible for heritage matters, I understand and share the concerns of the heritage community that important public records be preserved and made available for research and other purposes. We must also recognize, however, that it is not possible to preserve original documents in every instance, given their fragile nature and their long-term space and conservation requirements.

Present plans are to preserve the complete information content of instruments and deeds dating between 1868 and 1947 in two forms: full microfilm copies of the documents themselves and the original copy books in which the contents of the documents were transcribed. More than 15,000 of the original copy books have been placed on deposit in local archives and libraries by the Archives of Ontario.

When the current issue arose, however, the Archivist of Ontario, Ian E. Wilson, and the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations halted all further destruction of the instruments and deeds pending full consultation and review of this program. Information was widely circulated and considerable input has been received since last July.

To conclude this review process, I would like to invite the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario Inc., to participate on an advisory committee with the Archivist of Ontario and representatives of the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations. This special committee will include representatives of provincial heritage groups and will review the concerns expressed and all options available.

Until the advisory group's recommendations are considered by me and my colleague, the Honourable William Wrye, Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, all destruction of land registry office records will remain halted.

If the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario Inc. is willing to participate, would you please convey the name of the person who will represent your organization to Ian E. Wilson, Archivist of Ontario, 77 Grenville Street, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 2R9, (965-6953). I expect that a meeting of the committee will be arranged in the next few weeks. We will, of course, cover the travel expenses of those participating on this advisory committee.

Thank you for your interest and cooperation."

*Letter from Donna Baker, President of The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, Inc. to The Honourable Lily Oddie Munro, February 13, 1989.*

"This will acknowledge and thank you for your letter of January 27th re the Polaris program and the resulting concern of many heritage groups about the destruction of archival material.

We are certainly in agreement that a meeting be held of concerned organizations to discuss their positions and to look at the options available. Actually, there has already been a meeting of The Heritage Co-ordinating Committee on February 6th, 1989 at which time they voted to request a meeting with you. As we are part of this Heritage Co-ordinating Committee we would like to wait until this meeting before we commit ourselves to your very excellent suggestion of an advisory committee.

In any case, we would like to be as helpful as possible in resolving this problem.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Dr. Jean Burnet, Chairman of the Heritage Co-ordinating Committee."

## EDITORIAL

Six reports will follow this introduction. They will deal with a regrettable innovation; the retention of only the front wall of a building and its reapplication to the skeleton of a new structure. Some building preservationists have come to call this degenerative process Façadism.

### "NOT JUST ANOTHER PRETTY FACE"

One of the joys in working under the name Architectural Conservancy of Ontario is the requests, by politicians and the media, to spell that "C. word", Conservancy. During my last three years as Toronto Region Branch President I have mused as to how much easier it all would have been if the founding Mothers and Fathers of the ACO Inc. had opted for another moniker, say, Landmark Preservation Society. This is a typical handle for groups like us operating throughout North America and might more completely reflect the carefully worded constitution under which the ACO Inc. operates.

"to preserve, for the benefit of the people  
of the Province of Ontario, buildings and  
structures in the said province, of  
architectural merit ..."

We, at the Toronto Branch, find daunting the mandate that the founders of the ACO Inc. have charged us to fulfil. Let me repeat:

"to preserve, for the benefit of the people  
of the Province of Ontario, **buildings and**  
**structures ...**"

Building preservationists must co-exist with other disciplines whose co-operation is needed in our confrontations over redevelopment. The objectives and associated value systems of these other disciplines; engineers, planners, landscape architects, industrial designers and urban designers, may differ from ours. We must continually remind ourselves that we are the ones who claim to see the entity, the species, buildings as the most accurate reflection of the human experience. If partial retention must be tolerated then let the other disciplines advocate it as a solution. In so doing they will not be placed in conflict.

Strictly speaking, if ACO members want to pursue the retention of only the front elevation of a building then they should redraft the Constitution. They should put in place a series of changes that will enlarge the scope of our mandate to make it compatible with the much broader objectives of urban design. This change would be retrogressive for ACO. For society needs us, exactly as we are. We were not established to muck about with buildings. They either can be saved, or they can't.

I don't mean to disparage urban designers. If each community in Ontario had a practitioner active in the field, the quality of our lives would be greatly enhanced.

Should a conservancy branch direct its volunteer efforts to support the creation of a trompe l'oeil mural? As presently mandated, the answer to that question is an emphatic, NO! The difference between a mural and a façade retention is too subtle to allow me to make clear distinction. We are not taking a position in righteous isolation from reality. Rather, we are being pragmatic. At present more **buildings** of quality face oblivion than we, at ACO, have bodies to man the barricades.

We at the Conservancy must select our campaigns carefully, always bearing in mind the clause "to preserve ... buildings of architectural merit ..." Win or lose after each struggle, we must be ready to face a new challenge. We must arrive fresh, at the next crisis unencumbered by protracted dialogues. If we demonstrate a public willingness to compromise our principles to save some fragment at the expense of the whole we will be allowing our opponents to establish the standards and dictate the agenda. Soon we will be forced in every case to settle for the little they will give us, a façade.

Our Buildings have had many lives.  
Our Buildings tell storeys, stories that we need to understand.  
Often the better the Building, the better the storey.  
Façades may be alluring but they are mute.  
The presence of an appealing complexion does not guarantee a good conservation.

We should refuse to be side-tracked from our stated mission. As a private citizen I might devote time to ensuring that a façade was retained when it is one of a series and where its presence comments on its neighbours. I would not use the Conservancy letterhead to do the lobbying.

**Ergo, Don't expect me to support a motion redrafting the ACO Constitution.**

Alec Keefer

## FAÇADISM: PICTURE FRAME ARCHITECTURE

People who are familiar with the decor of contemporary hotel rooms can attest to the fact the art for these places is not chosen for the importance of the artist or the quality of the painting but rather for the way in which the picture will fit in with the surrounding wallpaper, bedspreads and lamp shades. The placement of such art most likely consists of situating the picture in the most convenient place in the room and then attaching it to the wall with nuts and bolts.

This practise of bolting paintings to the walls is not unlike the current architectural process taking place in downtown Toronto where historic façades have been attached to the front of modern buildings. This method of using historic fronts in modern streetscapes has become known as "façadism". The most striking feature of the streetscape at the base of the new Scotia Tower on Adelaide Street is the presence of the Wood-Gundy Building façade which is attached to a new section of the Scotia Tower complex. The Wood-Gundy Building originally stood at 36 King Street West and was built in 1898 with elaborate terracotta detailing. However, when the building was demolished, the front was saved and put into storage. The façade has now been resurrected in the Scotia tower development, albeit on a different building and at a different site.

The issue of façadism poses serious questions for those concerned with the preservation of historic buildings. No doubt some will view these façades and consider them a victory for historic preservation. But is it really? Is the importance of historic buildings limited to their façades? In my opinion there are three compelling arguments for saving an historic building in its entirety.

One reason that façadism must be discouraged is that the appreciation of an historic building goes beyond the front elevation. One of the joys of entering an old building is to become totally engulfed by history - to handle carved bannisters, read by historic light fixtures and gaze at ornate plaster ceilings. The interiors of these beautiful buildings are designed



The Wood-Gundy front relocated, or is it orphaned? on Adelaide Street West incongruously wedged in between dubious modern manifestos.

with structure, materials, finishes, light and ornamentation of the period, all in close interdependence with each other and with their façade. The importance of preserving a historic structure is to maintain the fabric of the entire building, not just its front façade.

An important aspect of appreciating the design of an historic building also involves understanding the relationship of the building to its location. Therefore, a further reason for discouraging façadism is that it allows for the movement of façades from their original sites. In the case of the Wood-Gundy Building façade, the front elevation has been moved from its original site. If the purpose of saving this façade is to give people a picture of nineteenth century Adelaide Street, then the picture given is an artificial one. A false impression will be created that this front was always on Adelaide Street. Good historians record their research in an accurate and responsible method so that later others will learn from their findings.

The movement of façades is a superficial method of documenting our city's heritage,

and will leave a mistaken historical image of the Toronto streetscape for future generations.

The final reason that façadism should be discouraged is that it has the potential to become the benchmark of historic preservation. Façadism has developed in Toronto as a result of the tremendous development pressures which have emerged in the downtown core. However, façadism is a capitulated compromise position which has sacrificed some of the most loved features of historic architecture, being the building's site and interior. A more appropriate location for building façades is in museums where they can be appreciated as artifacts of their time rather than on the front of new buildings where their placement has little relationship to the architecture behind it.

What is the solution? Is it not better, as some claim, to save at least the façade? In my opinion it is not. The answer is that we must work harder to build a popular movement which will aim to save the entire fabric of historic structures. We must publicize the importance that these structures play in the architectural and

historic continuity of our cities. In the meantime, we may lose some important historic buildings. However, it is important that an education process be developed that will make people aware of the loss of heritage buildings. An example of this education process has been the way in which railroad stations are now saved and their redevelopment potential appreciated. While some stations were lost at an earlier stage, publicity, outrage and development of a movement allowed for the preservation of many more.

Façades are not paintings which can be moved around and bolted to walls for a convenient effect. To achieve historic preservation with integrity, we must build a movement. We must make a stronger challenge to the city's planners, politicians, developers and citizens to preserve not only the façades but also the entire experience of our historic buildings.

John Ota  
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#### FAÇADISM: ONE CAMBRIDGE RESIDENTS VIEW

Warrenheath Investment's proposed IGA store is not a pure example of "façadism", but is is the closest example that Cambridge has of this kind of treatment. Rather than integrating the old structure's front façade into the new building's fabric, the architects incorporated the oldest section of a time-worn building into their overall scheme. The design calls for the old grist mill portion to house specialty shops and office space; a modern addition will comprise the actual super-



Jacob Hespeler Grist Mill, 927 King Street, Cambridge. Showing end of building which will abut

proposed grocery store. (Photo courtesy of City of Cambridge LACAC, August 1988)

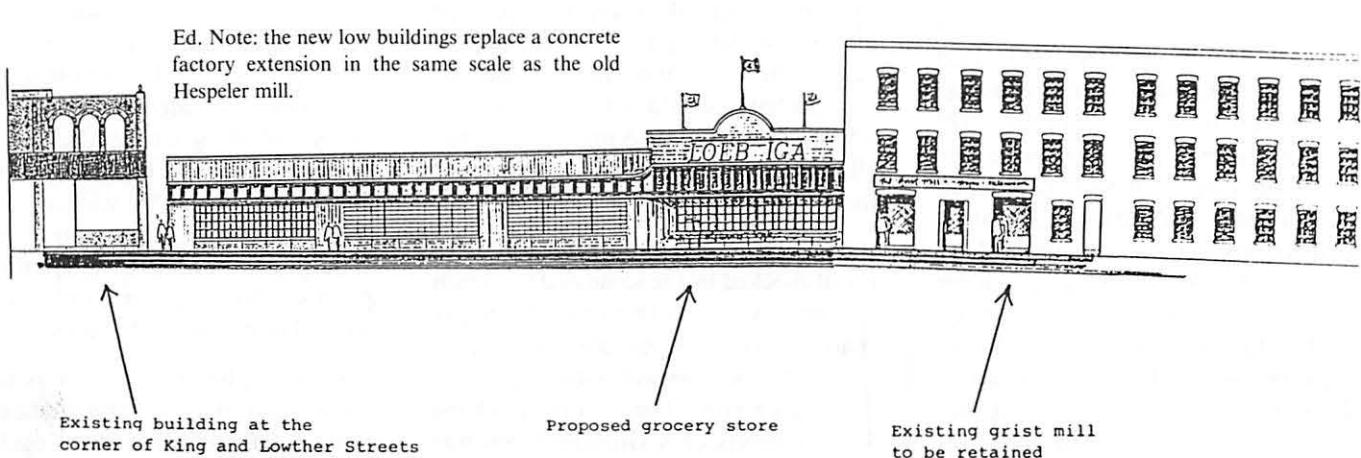
market. As the accompanying illustration shows, the proposed grocery store fails short of being sympathetically designed to fit either the grist mill or the surrounding architectural neighbourhood.

It is being called a "Downtown Enhancement Project" - at least, that is what the sign mounted on the historic building proclaims. But I cringe at the thought. No double this sentiment stems from my idealistic belief that old Preston's downtown would be enhanced by recognition of its unique Mennonite/German architectural history, rather than by having to compromise its integrity. I confess being relieved, however, that at least a part of the c. 1836 Jacob Hespeler Grist Mill (927 King Street East) - the oldest surviving industrial building in Cambridge - was preserved in the grocery store proposal. After all, by keeping the front façade of

the vernacular Georgian, three-storey limestone building, the relationship of the industrial structure to the street and its neighbouring buildings is retained. What is regrettable, though, is that a unique, limestone livery stable (originally south of the grist mill) had to be demolished as part of the "deal" to save the grist mill.

This example leads me to wonder how often culturally expensive wheeling and dealing occurs when preservation meets head on with "development". One writer on the topic asked whether façadism is rescue or "tokenism" (M.A. Smythe, 1986). I can't help but share her concern. The purist in me wants to see old buildings saved intact and within their original context. The realist in me accepts that something is better than nothing. Let's hope that the Annual General Meeting of the ACO in Toronto this spring results in

Ed. Note: the new low buildings replace a concrete factory extension in the same scale as the old Hespeler mill.



abundant discussions and constructive solutions - before development mania robs us of what remains of our architectural heritage.

Justine Murdy,  
Heritage Cambridge

## FACING FAÇADISM: THE CASE OF HAMILTON'S ZELLER'S BUILDING

Few preservationists would dispute the basic conservation principle that façadism is acceptable only as a last resort:

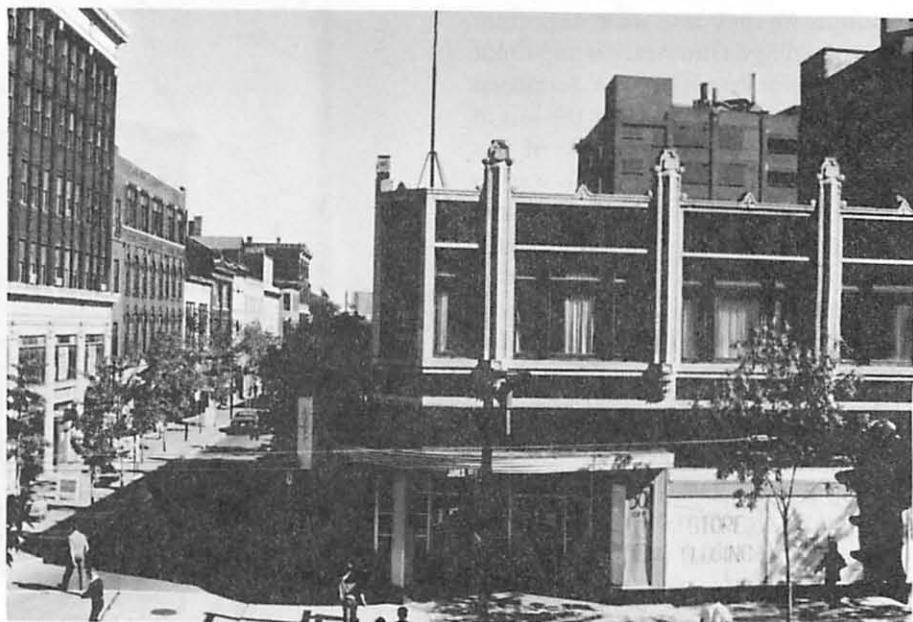
*"Removal of the structural and interior fabric of a building and retention of all or part of its façade as a decorative component in a new development violate much of the material value of a building, reducing it to an artifact without context. Such destruction of a building's uniqueness and setting can be accepted only as an alternative to total destruction."*

Source:

Mark Franks' *Well-Preserved: The Ontario Heritage Foundation's Manual of Principles and Practice in Architectural Conservation* (1988), p.51

Unfortunately, LACACs and municipal planners find themselves only too often in a "last resort" situation, given the inadequacies of Ontario's current heritage legislation for protecting buildings of architectural and historical value and zoning which encourages more intensive land use than currently exists in many of the older parts of our cities, combined with the pressure for redevelopment in our downtown cores. The recently demolished Zeller's building in Hamilton is a case in point.

The issue of "façadism" was raised in the last Branch report which recounted the doomed efforts of LACAC, supported by the local ACO branch, to save at least the two-storey front section of this 1929 landmark. By September 1988, when the Zeller's store closed, all delay tactics had been exhausted. LACAC's designation recommendation had been rejected by Council and Mr. Arthur Boiago, president of the company which owns the property, had refused to negotiate the retention of any part(s) of this historic building in exchange for zoning variances and density bonuses. (The demolition control by-law, which has proven to be a useful tool for



Zeller's Building, Hamilton: View across James Street North, looking along King William Street, September 1988. (LACAC photo: by Ann Gillespie)

delaying and preventing the demolition of residential properties in the City could not be applied to a building serving a commercial use.)

The Zeller's building was demolished over Christmas, leaving a large gaping hole in the ground and no immediate prospects of any new development on the site. The hole will undoubtedly be filled and paved over for yet another downtown parking lot, until the time is ripe for redevelopment. In cases like this, where vacant lot provides a ready source of income to the property owner/developer (because parking is a permitted use), a mothballed historic building simply becomes a liability, at least in the short term. Moreover, to persuade the owner to retain just the façade leaving it propped up in front of his parking lot in the hope that it could be later incorporated into a new development, would require very strong financial incentives (which the City probably would not be prepared to offer) even if it was technically feasible. Ultimately, this is a no-win situation for the preservationists.

Walking by the Zeller's site today, one is still shocked by the scene of destruction and negative visual impact of the empty space which only months ago was a noteworthy building with a strong presence within the historic James North and King William streetscapes. Given that there was no hope of seeing the building recycled in

its entirety, one still cannot help but wonder if some form of "façadism" would not have been preferable to total demolition. If, as Mr. Boiago suggested last September, the site were to be redeveloped as a hotel/office complex, it would have offered an excellent opportunity to at least explore the possibility of incorporating the handsome brick and stone portions of the front section of the building into the proposed new development. In the hands of a sensitive and creative architect, a satisfactory solution to the difficult problem of reconciling urban and heritage conservation objectives with the site's potential for redevelopment at a much higher density, might have been found.

For a number of reasons, the Zeller's building was a good candidate for façade retention. First of all, only the brick and stone portions of the two-storey front section were considered by LACAC to be worthy of designation; the one-storey King William façade had less architectural merit but enough to warrant at least partial retention. The interior which had undergone successive remodelling by Zeller's, however, no longer possessed any original or distinctive features.

Secondly, because of the way the two storey façade wrapped around the corner, its three-dimensional character could have been preserved by building behind (not

above) it and preferably stepping back the new structure so as not to dwarf the historic façade. From an urban design standpoint there is good reason to step back the King William front of any new development. The one-storey façade of the Zeller's building allowed sunlight to reach the south side of King William Street even in mid-winter, thereby creating a warm, inviting atmosphere along this pedestrian-oriented street with its variety of stores and restaurants. In order to preserve this ambience, any new development would have to be stepped back above street level, and theoretically could have been built behind the one storey Zeller's façade.

Finally, the Zeller's building would have been very compatible in height and detailing to the proposed new Eaton's Centre to be located directly across the street on the site of the present Eaton's store. In fact, the elevation of the two-storey Eaton's mall, with its ornamental brick piers terminating above the roofline and dividing the long façade into a sequence of bays, appears to taken its inspiration from the now demolished Zeller's façade.

In sum, a strong argument could have been made for retaining all or some of the original brick and stone street façades of the Zeller's building - as a "last resort". In a City where "façadism" has not yet been attempted, it should not be rejected outright on principle. We can anticipate similar situations where façade retention should at least be given serious consideration - the challenge then will be to prevent it from becoming a "hollow sham" in the hands of developers interested only in economic gain.

Ann Gillespie

## FACE VALUE IN PORT HOPE

By Tom Cruickshank

When viewed from Walton Street, the main street of Port Hope, there's nothing about the Smith-Russell Block to suggest it is anything but a handsome relic of the 1850s. But in fact the building, with its pilastered front and slender 6-over-6 windows, is barely seven years old. Walk around to the rear and the proof is there in the form of a very contemporary and



A brave face: the Smith-Russell Block in downtown Port Hope.

efficient concrete-block structure. Only the façade is genuinely old.

However, this is not a typical case of façadism. In fact, this is a rare example where façadism saved the day.

The three-storey Smith-Russell Block stands in the heart of Port Hope's historic downtown. In itself the building is a handsome composition and even more important is its role as a vital component of one of Ontario's best preserved street-scapes. But all seemed to be lost on a fateful night in 1980 when fire swept through the structure. Little was left except the walls. The owner lacked the means for anything more than a conventional two-storey replacement, so for a while it looked as though there would be an ungainly gap in the streetscape. Then the local ACO stepped in with a plan to contribute financially to the restoration of the façade (see ACORN VI.1). Eventually over \$200,000 was raised through government funding, foundations and private donations, and today the front stands proudly with the new structure behind. Port Hope's main street is the richer for it.

Preservationists usually have little use for façadism, but this is one instance where it proved a viable solution to a serious problem.

## LONDON BRANCH Façadism

"When an old face is pasted on to an entirely new building, that face tends to lose all its value." Most architects and preservationists probably find that this assertion by architect Michael Fish evokes a sympathetic response. A building's face is important mainly as an expression of the building behind it. A façade helps to define a three-dimensional space; it is not a two-dimensional work of art on its own. And if the space behind the façade is changed, the façade loses its integrity. Instead of serving as an honest guide to the building behind, it becomes a mere mask, that, like the alluring palace in the fairy-tale, changes into something altogether different as one goes through the door.

Yet, while these generalizations about the relationship between a building and its façade generally ring true, one can identify exceptions to the rule, where preserving a façade could be defensible even if the other three walls of a structure had to give way to a new development. The most common such situation occurs when a façade serves to define not only the interior space of the building it fronts, but also an exterior space which will remain when the rest of the building is gone. This was the case with the façade of London's recently

demolished (façade and all) Western Hotel (1856), which formed the visual cornerstone of the block facing St. Paul's Cathedral (1846) and its grounds. A simple Georgian building, the Western Hotel complemented the Cathedral in representing its historic context and maintaining its modest scale.

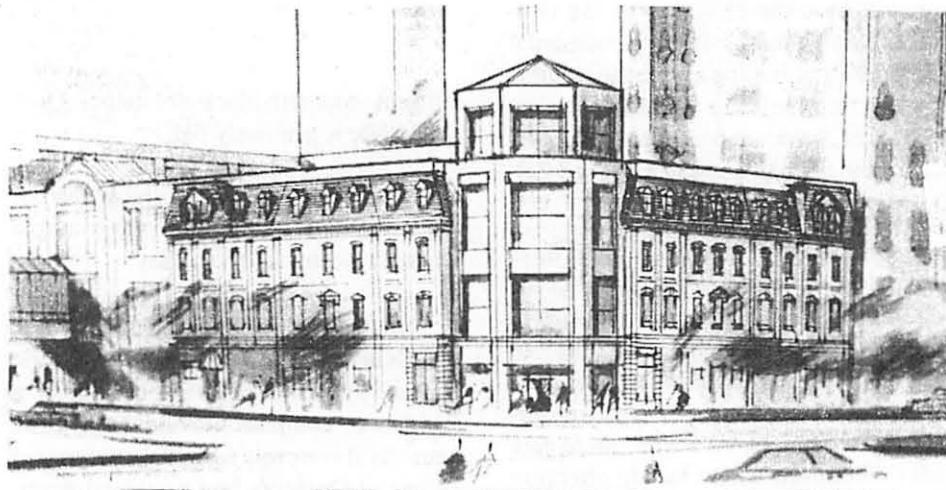
Similarly, rows of commercial façades generally serve to define the typical Main Street. Because most buildings there press right against their neighbours, passersby tend to be less aware of the structural mass on the far side of a façade than of the outdoor corridor formed by two facing walls of building fronts. Main street improvement programs that emphasize façade restorations implicitly recognize the special importance of the façades in this significant context. In London, a "Downtown Façade Study," carried out by architect Nicholas Hill and planner Ted Halwa in 1986, provides the foundation for the London Façade Improvement Loan Program (discussed further in the London Branch report).

Some of our thoughts regarding downtown façades have been brought into focus by our long fight to save the Talbot Block. One of the main reasons for wanting the block saved had to do with the aesthetic merits of the streetscape, and when considering a compromise with the developer, Talbot Coalition members reluctantly opted for a kind of modified façadism, allowing the building depths to be reduced, over sacrificing any segment of the streetscape. Discussions as to just how much the proposed mall could be allowed to encroach on the old buildings revolved on two implied relationships between the façades and the buildings they fronted.

First, it was felt that, to a certain depth, the interior spaces implied by the various façades should be maintained: interior walls should separate what looked like different buildings on the outside; floor levels should remain the same. (The developer consistently opposed to any conditions on the grounds that they were impractical in conjunction with the major department store he wanted on the site.) Second, it was thought that the doors of the old shopfronts should remain real doors, providing direct access from the street into the shopping area. This recommendation conflicted with the developer's



The Talbot Inn, south-west corner of Dundas and Talbot Streets.



The Cambridge Leaseholds proposal!

mall concept, where limited access to the street was to make the mall a self-contained unit. But many coalition and ACO members felt strongly on the issue, for several reasons: façades should be functional; direct access was necessary in order to retain a vital street life; and, finally, because of their individuality, the old façades seemed to invite distinctive shops which could prove a more magnetic attraction than another chain-store filled mall.

The dilemmas raised by the coalition's approach to compromise were never fully resolved because the developer, Cambridge Leaseholds Ltd., offered as a compromise its own version of façadism. Disguising its

proposal as a willingness to 'save' one building, the Talbot Inn, with 'minor alterations,' Cambridge actually offered only to keep the outer layer of part of the façade (or to replace it with a replica). Not to be sacrificed was the large modern glass tower that, in Cambridge's original plan, formed the main corner entrance into the mall. As a result, Cambridge's drawing of the remodelled Talbot Inn shows the east and north façades incongruously separated by a dominant modern entranceway. The design robs the old façade of symmetry, proportion, and, finally, of any claims to dignity. Even Cambridge's lawyer admitted to finding the new design 'silly', and few preservationists wish to see such a gracious old citizen made into a clown.

## BRANT COUNTY AREA FAÇADISM:

It is perhaps appropriate in some sense that this topic should be the first to be attempted by me as area editor. Façadism has been pushed beyond the natural limits that one might rightly expect by people like this editor. On this count, I stand guilty.

Perhaps I could make a case for not always intending or wanting to push this way. Poo-bah, in an animated discussion with the Emperor of Japan, as set down by Sir W.S. Gilbert of Gilbert and Sullivan fame in *The Mikado*, attempted to make a case based on good intentions alone.

I served for many years as chairman of the Brantford Heritage Committee, the local name for the LACAC. Most local building owners have had serious misgivings about heritage designation, seeing it as a socialistic usurping of their property rights. On more than one occasion, frightened citizens have expressed some such concern as, "I won't be able to change the colour scheme in my bathroom without permission of this committee."

How relieving it was to be able to say, "Oh no! You can do anything you like with what is behind. We only care about preserving the façade of your building."

Of course, we were hiding our true feelings. But if we tried to extend a heritage designation to features other than what is visible from the street, it is doubtful if we would have had a quarter of the designations we did manage to get. And it seems likely that City of Brantford experience has probably been reasonably typical.

It is likely that the effect of the Heritage Act, by seeming indifference to building interiors, probably encourages façadism. That may not really be bad. We have many older buildings whose façades form a part of the definition of our community.

A note of local triumph: The Commercial Buildings (a single building in spite of the grammatical plural) is now being redone, its ground floor to be shops and its upper floors "carriage trade" apartments. Its façade, with glorious bays

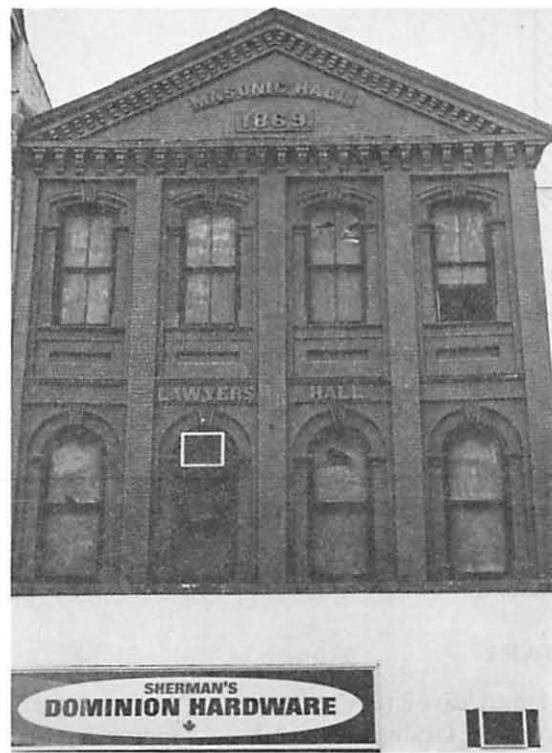
marching victoriously both ways from the corner of Dalhousie and George, is a great monument which arose from the mind of Brantford's nineteenth century architect, John Turner. The interior was appropriate to nineteenth century uses, but would now remain empty, and therefore threatened, without its rebirth in 1990s form. There is an article on this whole rebirth elsewhere in this article.

A short distance down Dalhousie Street from the Commercial Buildings is a delightful façade fronting a truly nondescript building. The old Crown Trust Building at Dalhousie Street has a white terracotta façade which incorporates three caryatids who have watched generations of Brantford people patiently and stoically as they have suffered graffiti, scratches and chips.

On the north side of Colborne Street, at number 76, we have the old Masonic Hall/Lawyers' Hall whose upper stories have a façade in brick, now painted, with pilasters and pediment of courageous Classic Revival grace. The Cornerstone Christian Church owns the building and



Old Crown Trust Building 114 Dalhousie Street, whose caryatids caused quite a stir in earlier twentieth century Brantford, it is reported.



Masonic Hall/Lawyer Hall, 1869, 76 Colborne Street, Brantford

Photos by M. Keefe

has been enthusiastic about maintaining the façade for the enjoyment of the community.

We lost a row of façades that could have been saved with enough imagination. After the loss through fire and the wrecker's ball of our historic Kerby House, a few bays of the old hostelry survived on the east side of George Street. These bays -this façade - could have been incorporated into the present Eaton-Market Square and formed into charming fronts for a row of boutiques at two levels. However, fast and easy construction allied with lack of imagination sacrificed this brick and stone nobility to the wrecker's ball. We now have a downtown commercial mall whose design high point rises to drabness and whose commercial success is to date rumored to be limited.

Façades are, of course, building faces. Perhaps the rules of this writing assignment oughtn't to be bent, but it is worth the try. Brantford has a row of buildings with interesting façades, but equally interesting, though different, backs.

Colborne Street is our historic main commercial thoroughfare. It runs along

an escarpment above the old Grand River flood plain. On the south side of Colborne, there remains a series of small buildings, mostly built to serve as outlets for nineteenth century entrepreneurs. It might be a challenge to make a case for architectural/historical right of preservation for any of these out of context. But in context lies a valid argument. These little storefronts give a comfortable scale and rhythm to this streetscape. They are well worth saving in their context going east from the Lorne Bridge over the Grand River.

At least equally interesting are the backs of these buildings. The foot of the hill - the edge of the old flood plain - has served as downtown's outlet to the world almost from the beginning. First it was the site of the canal docks of the Grand River Navigation Company. Merchandise was unloaded and put directly into the backs of some of the Colborne Street buildings. Then the water went away to be replaced by the interchange track between the Brantford and Hamilton Electric Railway and the Lake Erie and Northern Railway. The tracks went away and there is now a parking garage. Witness to all of this has been the "rear façade" of the Colborne

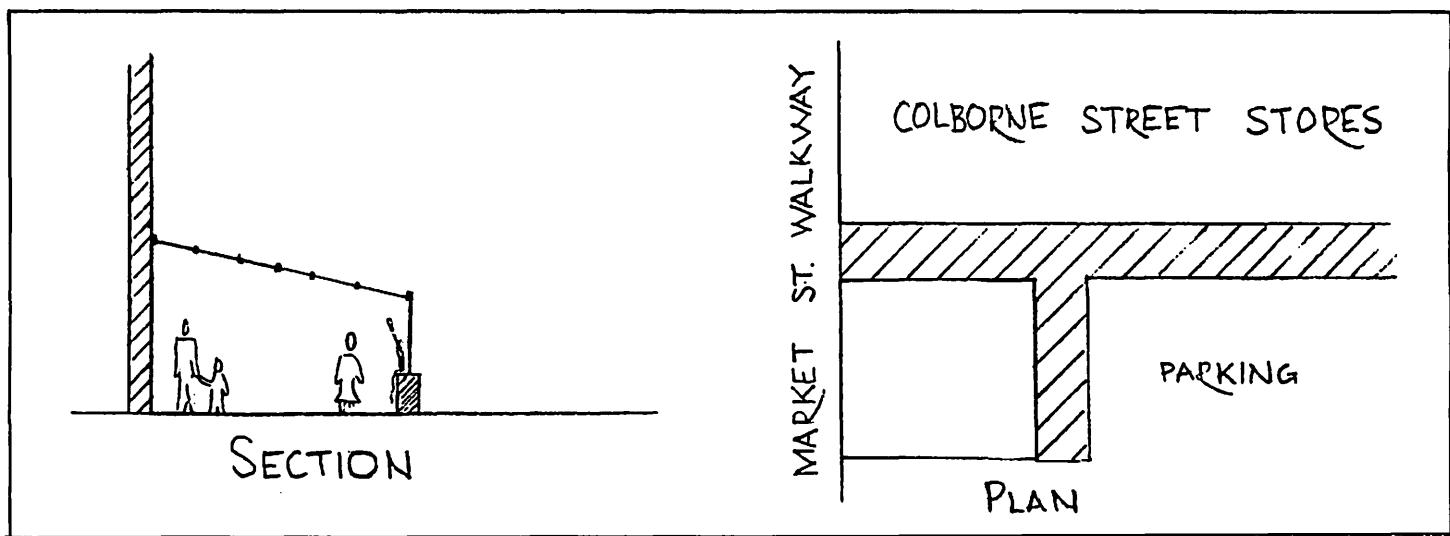
Street streetscape. These buildings extend their feet to various points, some to the bottom of the hill and others only part way down - a variety with visual steps.

Imaginative restoration of the fronts accompanied by imaginative restoration of the backs and appropriate landscaping of the hill itself would turn this area into a magnet for shoppers, tourists and artists.

We have our own scheme to blend façade preservation and commercial viability for the north side of Colborne, opposite the area discussed in the preceding three paragraphs. Behind these little buildings are an alley and a parking lot. Why not put up a T-shaped (in plan) lean-to with glass and plantings, to provide mall-type access to another section of older commercial buildings? This would allow the real fronts to be restored to their vintage appearance on Colborne Street, while the new mall-type rear entrances would encourage commercial viability.

In fine, Brantford has some unique contributions on façades/façadism. But are we really that unique?

Michael Keefe



Scheme for revitalization of the backs to Colborne Street Commercial properties. M. Keefe.

## COMMENTARY

Although I must leave it to Alec Keefer to say the word on façadism, which he decries as much as I do in its present state of a fad or rage, there are situations and a balance which might be put forward to elicit our readers' further responses. For

there are other shades of meaning, other approaches which beg some consideration and concern. If the game of musical fronts known as Façadism is to be played then certain rules need to be set up. The business of plugging old façades like

cherry lips into an ashen deadpan is, *entre nous*, definitely out, yet there are some so-called preservationists, God bless their tainted souls, who are promoting this abominable compromise. The next most reprehensible act is re-erection out of context, like the Wood-Gundy joke tang-

ling with the incomprehensible skeletal feet of the new Scotia tower on Toronto's Adelaide Street West. The two façades remaining in situ around the corner on Yonge Street will be comparably orphaned: Heaven knows what the result will be.

Or take the example almost opposite the Ontario Heritage Centre where a low-rise office block of the early twentieth century sports a glazed high hat: keep your visor down. Even then this curious composition is endowed with a new entrance of twinned engaged columns cannibalized from the upper storey of the adjoining pile. Pity the poor benighted designers were so ill-equipped philosophically and their vocabulary so abysmal that they could not finish the entablature off with appropriate returns: the cut-off ends look like an armless Aphrodite, the Venus de Milo is not even in it. No preservationist really likes historic bone-yards, or museum complexes, no matter how consummately conceived and executed whether it be Black Creek or Upper Canada Village. But for the latter virtually nothing bar a 1910 memorial church (to a former Conservative premier!) and two log cabins culled from elsewhere would have survived as a demonstration of the heritage of the seaway area of Eastern Ontario's Upper St. Lawrence valley. It seems urban development and redevelopment pose a like annihilation of our heritage, only the stakes are obviously higher in the urban game.

Alex Keefer quotes The ACO's constitution including "buildings and structures": The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario was incorporated "for the preservation of the best existing examples of the early architecture of the Province and for the protection of its places of natural beauty." Where, and how, do buildings, structures and architecture fit our current consideration and interpretation is obviously still a moot point. The front of a building, after all, may be the only part which could be termed architecture (or should it be Architecture with a capital A?), the rest merely a structure making the building useful. The larger definition would therefore take all in, whether regarded as architecture or not. But that is not the end of the question.

When one considers the many Southern Ontario towns whose main streets have been developed in virtually continuous fronts of speculative building, the front is usually THE thing, a decorative curtain wall making its own architectural statement. What goes on behind may have little relevance in many cases, but not all are devoid of reliable complementary interior treatment however. There's the rub: not all situations can be treated in the same way. Niagara-on-the-Lake's Queen Street, for instance, is an example of the informal, irregular or "primitive" main street where each building is an envelope with its own front, distinct and separate from its neighbour and hence a three-dimensional artefact to be preserved in toto. Exactly opposite is Port Hope's Walton Street erected as speculative street fronts to create a handsome streetscape, mostly in the later neo-Classical and Greek Revival styles. The interiors have minimal detail in most cases, their arrangement the bare essentials to provide storage space above the commercial enterprises on the ground floor. The retention of the three-storey front of the Smith/Russell Block of the 1850s after a fire gutted the building in 1980 seemed justified and was supported financially by Provincial funding. A modern substitute of a two-storey structure in heaven knows what design seemed a less attractive solution.

Take too the epitome of the curtain wall expressed by Thomas's fronts to Halifax's Granville Street in the 1860s, an essay in façadism where the architectural variations form such a fascinating response to a tragic fire which destroyed their predecessors. Likewise glazed fronts of comparable and later Victorian times in old Montreal represent the ultimate in such treatments: the cast iron front was often part of the development. Pity Toronto lost its double-fronted cast iron example just west of the Gooderham flatiron at the Wellington/Front/Church corner: now the only relief, and perhaps comically symbolic, is the west wall of the surviving "cheese" painted with a peeling façade!

Façadism is not yet dead, and may remain very much alive: it is a pity current haggling is making such a gory mess of it.

Think further, for instance, of how Toronto might possibly cope with the situation that threatens all its older and often architecturally more interesting commercial building. Therefore a thought might be shared with you. Can a site, a street, be set aside to display fronts of comparable interest and reasonably compatible in scale and size? In compensation to the owners some alternative benefits may have to be offered: such has been a practice in Toronto for some time. A pity that Toronto Street has been ruined by more recent development, the loss of the older post office at its head on Adelaide East and the old Masonic Hall on the west side, for it still has Cumberland and Storm's third post office of 1853, (headquarters of the Argus Corporation) on the west side, the Gas Company buildings at the north-east section and E.J. Lennox's King Edward Hotel as its base. But the massive redevelopment on the old Courthouse site at the south-east corner has knocked that for six. There is a short section of Colborne Street, between Leader Lane and Church Street which is open opposite E.J. Lennox's commercial range on the south side. Perhaps the greatest opportunity visually, but redevelopment seems to be marching on there inexorably with the loss of the Birks Building at the east end on Yonge Street, is Temperance Street. For here is the E.J. Lennox design of the Aikenhead block, centred on the south side and still a good north-east corner, requiring the restoration of its cornices, at Yonge. The rest is still open or unremarkable. Temperance would seem to be a possible theme: could Temperance Street possibly be a model? Or do we have to move further out, say to John Street? Here the front of the Grange, Toronto's oldest surviving brick house, forms its northern focus to remain an apprehensible and separate envelope within the proposed Stage 3 expansion of the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the neoteric obelisk of the CN Tower rises from its sporty dome clubbing at its foot.

Less conservation be charade  
And all that's left just memory  
Of all our building history  
Our pose, the least, should be façade?

Peter John Stokes

### QUINTE REGION

#### Belleville City Hall

The Quinte Region Branch held its annual general meeting January 15 at Belleville's old City Hall, which has just been lovingly and imaginatively refurbished to the designs of Bill White of Bel-Con Engineering. And Mr. White was on hand to show us around.

Where the rather boxy old building of the early 1870s had two ugly and inconvenient storeys plus an unused attic, there are now four floors of modern office space. The interiors are very striking, with unexpected vistas down through a glazed atrium and up through roof lights to the magnificent Gothic tower that is Belleville's chief claim to architectural glory. Even the tower contains a tastefully furnished committee room made dramatic with soaring brick walls.

Much play has been made of the zig-zag brown wooden trusses uncovered in the renovation and allowed to cut across council chamber, atrium, and offices alike. They become the dominating visual feature, and everything down to the carpet patterns is geared to their design. A memento of Victorian engineering of course they are, but if the 1870s builders had meant them to be seen, as in a bridge or an exhibition hall or a railway station, their bare geometry would have been given some Gothic trimmings.

We thought stripped-down orange brick had had its day, but here it is again, exposed as an interior finish.

It's all terrifically eye-catching and handsome. Pleasant, too, with rays of sunlight slanting through. And probably very efficient as a working place.

But one can't help thinking, what are all those offices doing in our City Hall? When this building was put up it did have a council chamber and three or four offices, but the main features were a large public hall or theatre upstairs and a public market downstairs. Now it's filled with a multitude of offices that ought to have gone into a proper office building such as, perhaps, the disused Cablevue



Belleville City Hall.  
Photo 1988 by R.C. Greig.

Building across the street, of which the façade is now slated to be used for something else.

Externally, Bel-Con have done a magnificent job, without actually changing City Hall's familiar look. Some corners have been cut, though. The three or four tall chimneys that once, long ago, reached for the sky, have been omitted, as have the lacy iron crestings that ought to have relieved the starkness of the too-straight roofline. Slate could replace the asphalt shingles that now clothe the mansard roof if there was money for quality upgrading. But the once-decaying cast-stone trimmings have been superbly restored like new, and the brick work made good. Visitors can admire, and Belleville can on the whole be proud of the result.

#### Quinte Tours

With a grant from the Ministry of Culture and Communications (and with Donna Baker as our monitor) we are working on a project to make a record of our famous Quinte Tours. This will take the form of a set of eight-to-ten-page booklets (possibly bound in one volume), a set of display panels, four for each locale, and a reel of slides for each of

twenty-four of the sixty-odd places we have toured. Materials are to be housed at the County of Prince Edward Archives, and of course made readily available. Many people have contributed photographs made on our tours, and a lot more must be made. The write-ups are not intended to be wordy, for the emphasis will be on visual aspects and the general aim is the same for our tours: getting out and looking at what we have. "What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare ..."

#### Branch Council

Since the Quinte Region is vast, and night driving not very satisfactory, we plan to have Branch Council meetings just quarterly, and during the daytime. We have set January 25, April 26, July 26, and October 25 as this year's dates. The meetings will always be in some central and architecturally interesting place, and always at 10 a.m. with a pot luck lunch. January's Branch Council meeting drew eighteen representatives from the whole width of our Region, and we hope for a continued close-knit association.

#### County of Prince Edward Archives

The old Registry Office building has figured several times in these pages. It's a highly specialized little building of vaulted brick, stone, and iron. It is secure in actuality as well as in appearance, but it is also highly accessible to visitors walking along Picton's Main St. When the land registry moved to new quarters across town, built into one of the gaolyards behind the Court House, County Council held on to the building. Though it was disused for a few years, they maintained it and even had the modern addition to Shire Hall next door done in mirrors to minimize the big building and glamourize the little one.

Their master stroke was in finding a new use that fitted perfectly: in the fall of 1983 they chartered the County of Prince Edward Archives, and the Historical Society became its unpaid volunteer employees. The Archives prospered and became well-known, and many people came from the County and from all across the continent to bring papers or to use the



Shire Hall and Registry Office with 1982 addition between from *The Settler's Dream*:  
photo by Tom Cruickshank.

collections housed there. Council even erected a bronze plaque out front mentioning the history of the building and commemorating its present use. Yes, the building is pinchy in reading-room space, but the safe storage area would not be full for another ten years.

One might have hoped that last year's roof episode would be enough: that mirrored wall now reflects the full splendour of a new asphalt tile roof where there was once the permanence of slate. But, with the current real-estate boom in the County, the administration needs more office space. Planning and land-division and severances are the thing, and the old Shire Hall, never very adaptable, has about reached its limit. It's a four-square, somewhat Classical, larger but simpler version of the little Archives building, like house and dog-house, side by side, its large centre hall and massive masonry safes between big front and rear offices take up a lot of space, and the council chamber takes about half the upper storey. The mirrored wing was built mainly to accommodate provincial court offices, and they flourish too.

One might have thought, with "Planning" in the air, new industry proposed, an unaccustomed building boom in progress, new residents coming to the County every day, a new planning director hired and a revision of the County's official plan promised, that the administration would plan themselves a new and efficient one-storey office space with lots of parking, in some central place out on the highway. The Archives could expand eventually

into the old Shire Hall, or into any parts the provincial courts didn't need.

But no, expediency seems to be the word. Council has determined to build yet another wing on to Shire Hall joining the back of the Archives building, which will be adapted for the offices of the roads department. Both buildings are designated under the Heritage Act, but the LACAC has not been consulted at time of writing (February 13). The Historical Society has no particular objection, for the Archives operation is to be transferred to the disused County Gaol, at the back of the Court House, leased by the County from the Province for this purpose, and it is a bigger building.

#### Prince Edward County Gaol

Prince Edward's famous stone court house was built in the early 1830s on a block given by the Rev. Wm. Macaulay.

Macaulay owned most of that side of town, which was known jocularly to Macaulay and his family at that time, and to everyone since, as "Delhi". This was possibly in reference to India's ancient ceremonial capital, because Macaulay had been making great efforts to gather all the important religious and judicial functions to his area. He got the Anglican church (while he lived: it moved later) and the Roman Catholic church, and the Court House, but for all his efforts the commercial functions in Picton obstinately flourished on the other side of town, and that's the side that was fashionable and grew.

The commanding site destined for the Court House had probably been thought of for legislative use by Macaulay from the start, for the block is bounded east and west by Portland Street and Pitt Street, and these are so named even on the lithographed plan that Macaulay got printed before 1825 and perhaps as early as 1817.

The split between the two sides of Picton that Macaulay helped engender continues today. As we said in the item on the Archives, the provincial court operations flourish in the over-crowded Shire Hall on the Main Street. But the fine old Court House, up there in full view on Union Street in Delhi, is hardly used.

We still have architect H.H. Horsey's specifications for the massive stone and brick gaol building that was stuck on to the back of the Court House in the mid-1860s. The building has long been condemned as unfit for prisoners and abandoned for a more modern regional facility



Rear view of Prince Edward County Courthouse showing Horsey's gaol with its chimney intact and the enclosing gaol wall. From *The Settler's Dream*. Courtesy of the County of Prince Edward.

near Napanee. Now Horsey's gaol building has been leased by the County Council from the province for a five-year renewable term, to house the County of Prince Edward Archives.

The Prince Edward Historical Society are pleased that the Archives (which they operate as volunteers) will have two or three times as much safe storage space as before. But they are rather taken aback to find that reading room space is, if anything, more constricted than at the old Registry Office. Still, the east gaol yard can very well be made to accommodate the building of a spacious and attractive reading room - perhaps something like what has been done for the modern Registry Office in the west gaol yard. Without that, the Archives will have trouble carrying out its mandate of serving the public.

Besides the shortage of public reading room space, there is the problem that the main safe storage space (in the former men's cell block) is not fit at present to receive the archival collections. Pipes and radiators are draped the full length of the wall where half the shelving ought to go, and a hot metal chimney from the Registry Office furnace cuts through it.

When this matter is cleared up, and the promise of proper reading room space established, then all other adjustments will begin to fall into place. One doorway may have to be cut through, to make the spaces work conveniently, but restoration rather than change is the word. To let the building speak for itself, the Province will have to be asked to replace the impressive stone chimneys, taken down a year or so ago but shown in our photograph from *The Settler's Dream*.

Intimidating the gaol certainly is, and was meant to be. That's the style of the building, and it accords fairly well with the suggestion that archival collections

are being kept safe there. The archivists will have to promote the interesting qualities of the building, and at the same time make their own function in it as warm and appealing as possible. Tourists will continue to be shown through in groups to peer into one or two of the gloomy old narrow cells and to view the unique double gallows, still in place above its drop. After this spring they will see archivists scurrying beneath the gallows fetching papers from storage for the use of researchers cozily ensconced in other cells fitted with shelves and desks, microfilm readers and computers, and the main corridors lined with track-lit exhibitions and interpretative displays.

#### Hallowell Mills

Mr. Jones's proposals for the old Bethlehem Steel dock area at Hallowell Mills near Picton, discussed in the last issue of ACORN, have evoked a confused response. There are those who have built attractive houses on the water and don't want quarrying or industry nearby. There are those living on the main street at that end of Picton who have seen the growth of heavy traffic and felt the daily dynamite blast from the cement plant, and don't want more of this. There are those who see the railroad, the high-level bridge and highway, and the deep-water docking facility all coming together at this site, as a future industrial and commercial benefit to the area. There are those who have seen the disappearance of shipping and canning and fruit growing and cheese production and virtually every other industry, and would welcome any source of jobs that might keep some of the County's sons and daughters employed close to home. There are those who wish to preserve the White Chapel and its ancient cemetery, and the three notable brick or stone houses a little further down the same road, as well as the striking natural configurations of the cliffs

and water.

A remarkable feature of the dispute is that no one seems to notice the dangerous and unsavoury operation that goes on at present. We have wondered whether traffic vibration, such as that caused by the heavily-laden tandem trucks that constantly go in and out of the site, may not have contributed to the subsidence of so many of the old gravestones around the White Chapel. Their crazy angles were highly picturesque material for a painter, but there was danger of their falling and crushing people and they have all recently been set straight, in concrete.

If it hadn't been winter, the Quinte Region Branch ought to have held one of its famous tours of the industrial site. People would have been shocked at the mammoth heaps of coal and other materials, so near Picton's water intake, and the monstrous size of the excavation practically across the street from the White Chapel.

Mr. Jones's proposal addresses all these problems most thoroughly, it appears, and promises a buffer zone and supervision by the Province under the Pits and Quarries Act and full environmental controls. The present owner seems to have been going on without any of this.

Our Branch's policy, we think, has to be to take a look for ourselves and encourage others to do the same. The importance of the White Chapel is absolute, and its well-being is non-negotiable. No one questions this. But the rest of the matter is far from clear.

#### Ed. comment:

Other aspects of concern are addressed in Reverend Murray's letter to the Editor.

What was suggested, but perhaps not emphasized sufficiently, in Rodger Greig's last article on the subject was a separate entrance to the site of the highway *away from the White Chapel* so that this historic landmark should remain inviolate and protected.

## POR HOPE

### A Job Well Done

The scaffolding is finally down and the results are splendid. Robin Long and Long Brothers Limited can be justifiably pleased with the completed restoration of their 1845 Gillett Building on Walton Street.

The building has undergone a remarkable transformation since the project began about a year ago (see ACORN XIII.2). The most noticeable change is the restoration of the six over six sash in the original pattern. Other cosmetic improvements include the painting of the building in subtle though striking hues that lend the composition a new prominence among

Port Hope's downtown buildings. The colour scheme echoes the combination of the original natural red brick and grey sandstone dressings contrasted with the sharp white of frames, sash and cornices bringing out the building's Greek Revival character. Even the signs announcing the new main-floor tenant (Standard Trust) elicit praise.

The shopfronts of the corner section have been returned to a Victorian appearance, based on archival photographs from the turn of the century. This is not the original configuration and although some evidence to suggest earlier treatment was found, the later arrangement was more clearly documented in photographs and hence gained favour as a condition for Provincial funding. The result represents the evolution of the building and provides an interesting contrast between the upper floors in their original state and the updated round-arched bankfronts of 1879.

The outside work is virtually complete, but inside, the upper floors are not yet finished. The upstairs space offers terrific potential, especially the huge lodge-room (or was it a ball- or a board-room?) on the third floor that stretches the length of the building. Its fourteen-foot ceilings and ornate plasterwork are truly inspirational.

### PoMo Comes to Port Hope

Port Hope can boast at least one example of virtually every style of nineteenth-century architecture, and a few from the twentieth as well. Now we can add post-modernism to the list, with the recent construction of a new home for the town's Waterworks Commission.

The style, currently sweeping the towns and cities of southern Ontario, harkens back to an earlier time by borrowing ornamental motifs from the past and placing a visual emphasis on details and novelty. Architectural purists loathe 'PoMo' as a Disneyland approach to style with no real substance, and as 'exterior decoration' that claims a kinship with the past but pays only lip service to historical integrity.

Perhaps it's no surprise, then, to learn that the new Waterworks building has drawn mixed reviews. With its polychromatic brickwork (which would look more at home in Orangeville than Port Hope), exaggerated entrance and 'snap-in' window muntins, it is arguably a very stylish building, but none the less has raised the ire of many a preservationist. Built on a corner lot at John and Augusta Streets, distant from the main downtown core, it is a prominent but not dominant part of the streetscape, but its flashy "pizzazz" seems at odds with the staid 1867 Baptist Church and c. 1859 Bank of Upper



The Gillett Building, 1845, once again the pride of Walton Street.

Canada adjacent. However, at least the building addresses the issue of scale and maintains a certain continuity with its older neighbours by being built on the street line (commendably, parking is hidden at the rear). It remains to be seen if the building stands the test of time, but for now its critics can take solace — it could have been a lot worse.

### Fire Disaster at Marie Dressler House, Cobourg

Preservationists were alarmed when word came in mid-January of a calamitous

blaze at Cobourg's Marie Dressler House. It was sad news, for the diminutive house has long been a distinguished landmark of our neighbour to the east, only slightly less well known than its most important structure, Victoria Hall.

The house was the birthplace of Marie Dressler, the portly actress who gained international acclaim (and an Oscar) for her role in the 1930s classic, *Tugboat Annie*, among other films. For years the house has been a restaurant, filled with memorabilia commemorating Miss Dressler's rise to fame.



Port Hope's new and controversial Waterworks Commission Building, 1988.

But there's more to the house than its connections to a Hollywood legend. It is also a fine example of period architecture. With its low, single-storey silhouette and wide eaves, the brick house typifies the Ontario cottage style. The doorcase, with fanlight and sidelights, has drawn many an admiring glance.

The fire was devastating but not as bad as first thought. Most of the damage was contained within the kitchen tail and it appears the building is salvageable. However its days as a restaurant seem to be over. In early February, the Dressler House was purchased by the Cobourg Chamber of Commerce, which plans to make the building its headquarters. It is a fitting choice, given its significance. It is hoped that the ensuing renovations are faithful to the building's true character.

Ed. comment: Many will remember the Marie Dressler House in the heyday of the Field family who first ran it as a restaurant and one relaxed in the charming parlour awaiting a seat for dinner, then to



Cobourg's Marie Dressler House, after the fire, its roof temporarily patched with plywood.

Photos by Tom Cruickshank.

dine to the occasional delightful accompaniment of a music box and the unforgettable spike to one's soup of peppered sherry prepared by Lenah Field Fisher.

That was when Victoria Hall's fate was still in question or was it ever really so as long as Mrs. Fisher was on council?

## DURHAM REGION

### Preservation Awards

The Preservation Awards as described in the last issue were presented to the winners at a special dinner on January 28. The guest speaker was Val Swain, a former mayor of Kingston and currently a governor of Heritage Canada.

His address covered a number of the new initiatives of Heritage Canada such as the Canadian Centre for Livable Places, a centre to research and help alleviate the conflicts which inevitably develop between

citizens, councils, planners and developers.

Nominations have opened for the 1989 awards and some have already been received. The Branch is looking for a broader range of entries than in the first year.

### Lynde House Designation

The report of the Heritage Review Board into the designation of Lynde was finally released and it recommended that a heritage easement would be more appropriate as it would provide this important building a greater measure of

protection.

Whitby Town Council has decided to proceed with designation as originally planned.

### Henry House Designation

Oshawa City Council, which has no LACAC, is considering the designation of Henry House, a part of the Oshawa Sydenham Museum complex which is operated by the Oshawa and District Historical Society. If this goes through, it would be the first building designated in Oshawa.

## HAMILTON-NIAGARA

### Report on the T.B. McQuesten Awards Ceremony by Elissa Siroonian, Branch President)

November 15 was a very memorable evening for the Hamilton-Niagara Branch. The annual T.B. McQuesten Awards in Architectural Conservation were presented for the fifth time at a well-attended ceremony at Whitehern, the former family home of Thomas B. McQuesten.

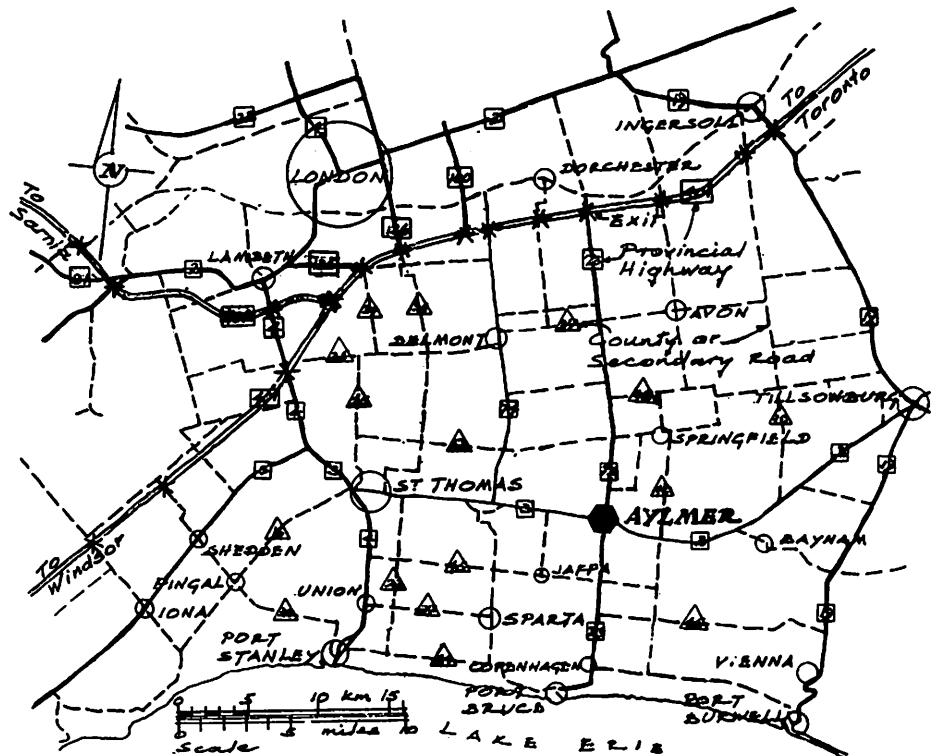
Members and guests were greeted by the Branch Executive, followed by speeches from Dr. Lily Oddie Munro, Minister of

Culture and Communications and Dr. Richard Allen, M.P.P. for Hamilton West. Four renovation/restoration projects completed or nearly completed in 1988 were presented with awards in the form of a plaque. Henry Li, Architect with the Ministry of Government Services, accepted the award for the adaptive re-use and exterior restoration of the provincially-owned Carnegie Building (former Hamilton Public Library) for use by the Unified Family Court. Jack Hall accepted an award on behalf of the old St. John's Stamford Heritage Association for the

conservation of St. John's Church in Niagara Falls (one of the oldest Anglican churches in the province) and for its adaptive re-use as a columbarium. Hamilton's Custom House is being revitalized through the efforts of owner and College of Martial Arts director, Don Warrener, who accepted an award for the exterior restoration of the building. The fourth award, presented to the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth for the restoration of the Thomas B. McQuesten High Level Bridge, was accepted by Ted Gill, Manager of Project Planning for the

Aylmer, now with a population of some 5,500, the largest community in the Township of Malahide, is second only to the county seat of Elgin, the city of St. Thomas, some sixteen kilometres to the west. Located on Highway 3, the old Talbot Road, and Highway 73 between 401 and Port Bruce on Lake Erie, the town is also served by rail, but no longer has a station. Catfish Creek flows through the centre of the community. Originally known as Hodginson's Corners, then for a short period as Troy, the north end as Walkerton, it took its name in 1835 from Lord Aylmer, serving from 1831 to 1835 as governor-general of the Canadas.(1)

Incorporated as a village in 1872, Aylmer's first civic building, replacing the original Malahide Township Hall, was the Town Hall and Opera House, the work of Thomas Woester. (2) This is a fine essay in the Italianate erected in 1873, with elaborate brickwork, Florentine windows, bracketed cornice and cupola. The building became too small and the old Post Office of c. 1900 was made over into municipal offices some thirteen years ago. Then demolition threatening, it was mainly the efforts of local citizens, especially Mr. Wilfrid Chalk, and supported by Councillor Barons in particular, which encouraged its salvation. After a study by Carlos Ventin, Architect, proving the project's feasibility, the library was relocated to its ground floor. Last year saw the refurbishing of the Opera House and the added amenities, though somewhat curtailing its seating space, contributed a great deal to its new multi-purpose use. Various adaptations have not permitted the restoration of the old decoration, vestiges of which survived on the cove of the original ceiling. Moreover the auditorium had been modified about 1911 with stage and gallery so that the original painting and fresco by Walthew of Detroit (3) may have been changed. However a boldly coloured unionjack has been painted on the ceiling as a memento. All that is required to complete the exterior is the restoration of the handsome cupola, for which funds are still being sought: such may be sent: -



c/o Wilfrid Chalk  
90 St. Andrew Street,  
Aylmer, Ontario  
N5H 2N3

Starting out as a cross roads settlement, Aylmer rapidly assumed the role of a local centre serving the rich farmlands about and developed its complement of essential service industries. The coming of the railway, the Great Western Air Line, in 1873 consolidated that position and encouraged manufacturing on a larger scale, with mills, foundry, pork-packing house, a milk-evaporating plant and shoe factory among the main establishments subsequently. Prosperity continued into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. An airfield for training was established nearby in World War 2: this became the nucleus of the Ontario Police College. After the war Imperial Tobacco located here and the whiff of curing tobacco even now pervades part of the town.

Aylmer's buildings are of interest as the illustrations show and include not only the public buildings and churches, but a full complement of houses representing all its historic periods from the Greek Revival "Ontario cottage" on Sydenham Street East and the Belvedere House of c. 1858,

with its separate bake-cum-smokehouse behind, on South Street West, to the many splendid mid and late Victorian examples and some even later signifying the town's past prosperity. The details are particularly notable and a walk around town is worthwhile. Property values too are still reasonable should you have cause to consider moving there. The commercial core is closely knit around the main corner and exhibits yet some character although it has suffered a series of drastic fires over the years and has been rebuilt, piecemeal, a number of times.

As the map indicates Aylmer is close to St. Thomas and London, yet far enough away to have a life of its own. Other places of local interest are also marked should you wish to prolong your excursion in the area.

PJS

(1) From *Aylmer, A Walk Through Time*, by Sue L. McConnell, Elgin Public Library Board, St. Thomas, Ontario. 1981.

(2) Marion MacRae and Anthony Adamson in *Cornerstones of Order* note Albert Mellish as the probable designer.

(3) From *Historical Atlas of Elgin County*. H.R. Page & Co., Toronto, 1877 (offset edition 1972)

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Top: Aylmer Town Hall and Opera House 1873  
Centre left: Interior of Opera House: view from balcony  
Centre right: Old Post Office c. 1900, now municipal offices  
Lower left: Talbot Street East, south side  
Lower right: Old Carnegie Library